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## Contributed Notes.

### THE FAITH OF AL-ISLĀM.\*

In my article on *The Faith of al-Islām* in Vol. XII. of this Journal and on p. 117 I leave a gap in the translation of Abū Ḥafṣ an-Nasafī's tractate and add the note: There are four words here of which I can make nothing. Literally they read: *and (or although) it is not a thing or a man.*

The words were unintelligible to me because I mistranslated them and they were mistranslated because I mis-read them. The whole sentence should run: And what does not exist is known of God Most High just as what exists is known of Him and it (*i. e.*, what does not exist) is not a thing nor an object of vision.

This is a statement of one of the most abstruse doctrines of al-Islām and the part over which I stumbled has not, so far as I know, been discussed by any European Arabist. Perhaps, under these circumstances, a little detail in explaining it may not be out of place. The source on which I draw is the *Ithāf as-Sāda al-Muttaqīn* by the Sayyid Murtaḍā (the author of the *Tāj al-'Arūs*), a commentary on the *Ihyā 'Ulūm ad-Dīn* of al-Ghazzālī in ten large quarto volumes, Cairo, A. H. 1311. In Vol. II., pp. 124 *sq.*, it is treated elaborately under two heads. First, is what does not exist an object of vision to God? And, secondly, can it be described as a thing, an entity? Both points are decided in the negative on the authority of (naql) and with the arguments ('aql) of the schools of both al-Ash'arī and al-Māturīdī.†

The question may be stated thus: God knows everything, that which exists (al-mawjūb) as well as what does not exist (al-ma'dūm). Is then, seeing God knows it, that which does not exist an object of vision to God? It was argued by some that it must. What exists *now*, was from all eternity (fil-ajl), only lacking the accident ('ard not dhāt) of existence; it was ma'dūm, a non-existing thing, and if God sees it now that it is mawjūb, must He not also have seen it then? The answer is that from all eternity it only existed in the knowledge of God (fi 'ilmi-llāh) and so was only ma'lum and could not be an object of vision. Again it was argued: If God cannot see the ma'dūm is that not a falling short in His attribute (ṣifa) of vision and a detraction from God? The answer is that what does not exist cannot from its nature be seen; the lack is in it, not in the attribute of God which does not come into contact with it. Again: Does this not involve a change in God's attributes that at one time He should see a thing and at another time, not?

\* Additions to line 13 of page 117 of AJSL., Vol. XII., 93-117.

† Page 107 of article, AJSL., Vol. XII.

No, it is a change in the thing with which the attribute comes into contact; creating is an attribute of God from all eternity, but there was a time when the created world was not.

This is a very brief abstract of some of the arguments. The difficulty, it will be seen, essentially goes back to the second question, Is the non-existing a thing, an entity? The decision here is that it is a pure negation (*nafy maḥd*); but the great body of the Ma'tazilites regarded it as a thing (*shay'*). They held that there were quiddities (*māhīyāt*), verities (*ḥaqā'iq*), entities or essences (*dhawāt*) in two states, *viz.*, of possessing existence and not possessing existence. In support of this they pointed out that things lacking existence are distinguishable in themselves from one another, and that whatever can be distinguished, one from another, consists of verities individual in themselves. Into this it is unnecessary to go further. The position is clear; it belongs to pre-Kantian metaphysics.

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